

RAILROADING

Post-Visit Activity

Activity	People of the Rails
Adapted From	"All Aboard" — A Thematic Unit from Steamtown National Historic Site
Setting	Classroom
Duration	Approximately 1 hour
Subject Areas	Language Arts, Social Studies
Skills	Listening, Developing, Creating, Analyzing
Grade Level	4-5



Objective:

Students will be able to:

1. learn about people associated with the railroad through stories and train legends
2. write a narrative about a railroad person

WW-IGOs:

Language Arts - 4.11, 4.12, 4.19, 4.50, 5.15, 5.19, 5.55

VOCABULARY

legend
incident

MATERIALS

1. book: *John Henry, An American Legend*
2. book: *Kate Shelley and the Midnight Express*
3. other books or stories about people associated with the railroad

BACKGROUND

Was there a steel driving man who raced against a steam drill and died with his hammer in his hand as ballads portray? Legend says there was such a man who worked driving steel by hand into the hard rock of Big Bend Mountain. Could it have been John Henry, who worked for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway in the early 1870s, driving steel to build a tunnel through the mountain? John is said to have been a 200-pound, six-foot-tall African American who could drive steel with a hammer in each hand.

Greeley was a vanishing breed of C&O Railway brakemen who took many younger workers under his wing. "Don't worry, kid; I'm looking out for you!" the old brakeman would say. These reassuring words often came after a good "calling down" when we did something stupid — like forgetting to fill the caboose lantern with oil at the beginning of the run.

Forty years later, his words still rang true as one senior engineer recalled recently. "One dark and gloomy night in April several years ago, the Greenbrier River was flooding and it rained so hard I could barely see the tracks. After I pulled the run out of Hinton, we rounded a bend to see a large boulder ahead on the tracks. I was lucky to stop the train before I hit it. It took the whole crew of us to pry that rock off the track."





BACKGROUND *Continued*

Greeley's ghost had smiled upon him once more; he could hear him say, "Don't worry, kid; I'm looking out for you."

PROCEDURES

1. Read one or more of the stories about a railroad person.
2. As a group, discuss who the people were and their association with the railroad.
3. Direct students to write a narrative about one of the people in the stories or about someone they know who was associated with the railroad. (They can also write about what they learned about the people of the railroad during the in-park program.)

EVALUATION

Allow students, if they wish to, to share their story orally with the class.

EXTENSION

1. Read the book *Casey Jones* by Carol York.
2. Have several students dress as John Henry or Casey Jones (with bib overalls, handkerchief, engineer's cap, hammer, etc.) and let them visit the classrooms of the lower grade students either to read the story of John Henry or Casey Jones or to tell about it.
3. Choose other famous names that were involved in the development of the railroad and have students research to find what contribution each made to railroad history. Then have them report to the class. Examples: Buffalo Bill, George Pullman, Samuel F.B. Morse, James Watt, Collis P. Huntington, and John Stevens.

